



Printed
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Birmingham Society

FOR

CONSTITUTIONAL INFORMATION.

FIRST INSTITUTED NOVEMBER 20, 1792.

PRINTED FOR THE SOCIETY.

MDCCXCII.

Birmingham Society

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PRINTED FOR THE SOCIETY.

MEMBERS.

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Birmingham Society

FOR

CONSTITUTIONAL INFORMATION,

ADDRESS.

WERE we only to give you the opinion of William Pitt before he got into place; and the Duke of Richmond, who spoke the sentiments of nine thousand of the nobility and gentlemen, called the Yorkshire Association, under the guidance of the late Marquis of Rockingham; begun in the year 1780; we apprehend it would be an answer sufficient against every objection or malicious charge which place-men and pensioners might assert against the people of England setting up schools in every town and village throughout Great Britain, to instruct the ignorant and superstitious, to open the eyes of the blind, and guide one another in that political knowledge which so importantly concerns and affects every person born in this nation, in such manner, as forms the virtues and vices of both body and mind; for oppression by taxes affects both.—And it is alarming enough, and especially to the poor labourer, when it is considered that it takes the labour of sixty thou-

land persons, or such a town as Birmingham, to maintain one single individual of this nation. We call the attention of all the labourers of Great Britain, to this remarkable truth;—and we defy all ministerial trumpeters and sycophants, pensioners and place-men to disprove this proposition: admitting sixty thousand inhabitants in Birmingham, our wives and our little ones, our sick and our lame, our rich and our poor, our young and our old; in short, male and female; every one must work every day, Sundays too must not be neglected, and and earn one shilling per day, and every day, sick or lame, fit or unfit, nay, all the days of his life, to maintain this one single individual. Alas! Alas! what a good constitution!

Now, if we have a good constitution, why fear a wise, cool, and deliberate investigation? But if it be good only for kings and princes, for pensioners and place-men, for mortals of a different race, who hold in divine and hereditary rights, exclusive and hereditary privileges; and such like popish relics and superstitious phantoms; then the people have a right to say, “it is good for you, but not so for us:—we are not represented; our money is taken from us by laws to which we have not consented; either by ourselves or our representatives; nor can we conceive how any persons can be so wilfully blind as to say, “there wants no reform, we are well enough as we are;” when Pitt and Richmond can prove that a majority of the mock-representation of the people, in what is falsely called the

the House of Commons, are obtained by seventy or eighty persons by means of Borough rights or Borough property. Thus is our hard-earned pelf, with that of our offspring or children bartered away, and mortgaged for generations to come, by priest-craft and state-craft, locusts and caterpillars, of a far worse kind than covered the land in time of Egyptian darkness, when the people were commanded "to make brick without straw."

Now, to remove these evils from ourselves and our posterity, we are free to declare, is the full intention of our meeting together; to establish a brotherhood of affection with the whole human race, for the promotion of knowledge, and to establish love and good-will among all men, the free citizens of the earth.

Thus we declare to hold ourselves free from all parties whatever; either religious or civil, ministerial or anti-ministerial; and to note the speeches of placemen and pensioners.

We feel ourselves sorry at what has recently happened in this town;—to our eternal disgrace it is mentioned in every town and village throughout this nation, and in all civilized countries. And that we have to lament, that party spirit which has been too successfully excited by cunning and artful men from whose situation in life, we might have expected better things, than to have stimulated the unwary and the ignorant to such acts of outrage, which is

not only a violation of the "rights of man," but manifestly proving themselves to be the greatest enemies that church and king can ever experience. But we are glad, fellow-townsmen and brothers, that darkness is dispersing,—light is springing forth in your minds,—you are determined to speak, think, and to act for yourselves; and to join the sons of freedom."—You need only wish to be free, and you are so,—speak—and the thing is done.

We believe you ardently beg pardon for the barbarities committed, and the insults offered to your countrymen, brothers, and free citizens; and that Birmingham will yet atone for its cruelties and follies, and be no longer a reproach to other countries; that her trade may more abundantly flourish. For it is a well known matter of fact, that some free nations abroad, and free people at home, have refused to use some articles of the Birmingham manufacture, on that very account: and have substituted Vigo buttons, which may be made any where, and shoe-strings, to answer the same purposes; besides endeavouring to carry the trade from the town into other countries, where the mind of man can enjoy true and real liberty, without any dread from his brother man, because he may be of a different opinion, either political or religious: for man is not an enemy to man, except made so by priest-craft and state-craft.

Therefore, whoever has got a spark of zeal for liberty and human happiness, may see the dawn of
a glorious

a glorious day ! When sentiments congenial to those of liberty prevail in Britain, let prosecutions for libels by the pensioners and courtiers go on as they may. To see two nations at the head of the world, convinced of the folly of war, and laying aside all jealousies, to embrace each other, and form a fraternal and intimate union, would be glorious indeed !

But if we turn our eye to those who have no sentiment of compassion but for the rich and the great—the kings and the nobles of the earth, who can contemplate, without emotion, the prospect of bloodshed and devastation among millions of our fellow men, devoted victims of pride and despotism, and who bewail with feminine lamentation the loss of a nick-name, or gewgaw—the broken play-thing of a puerile nobility ! who seem to regard the people as fit only for the goad—the whip, and the spur ; for labour without intermission, in peace ; for slaughter, without commiseration, in war ; and who, blaspheming against human nature itself, impiously term the great mass of mankind “ *the swinish multitude*.”

Why then are we abused ?—when we solemnly declare, before God, and all men, that we only want such a reform in the parliamentary representation of Great Britain, as will constantly and uniformly speak their sentiments ? At present, that house does not consist of the representatives of the people, but of lords, and rich landholders ; of ministers and borough-mongers, who buy and sell

seats in parliament, as "openly and notoriously as stalls for cattle at a fair." Therefore, it is not true that this government is a government by king, lords, and commons; for the commons, or people, are not represented. "The commons of England in parliament assembled," is a phrase false and absurd; it should be, "The deputies of the aristocracy in parliament assembled."

These ministerial defamers bring to our mind Henry Knyghton, a canon of Leicester, who complains heavily of Wickliff the reformer, his neighbour and contemporary, for having "translated out of Latin into English, the gospel which Christ had intrusted with the clergy and doctors of the church, that they might minister it to the laity and weaker sort, according to the exigency of times, and their occasions; so that by this means the gospel jewel, or evangelical pearl, was made vulgar, and thrown about and trodden under foot of swine." [*Lewis's Hist. of the Bible.*]

Thus we see that public ignorance is the cement of the far-famed alliance between priest-craft and state-craft; and that political and religious impostor, cannot maintain its ground, if knowledge and discussion once find its way among the 'swinish multitude.' Hence we have a clue to the true source of prosecutions for libels, and public proclamations against constitutional societies, and seditious correspondences! But mystery cannot last for ever: its day is far spent; darkness is dispersing; and we
now

now have the true touchstone, the shibboleth, by which the real friends of the people may always certainly be known: those who mean well to the people, say, "think for yourselves, read for yourselves—decide for yourselves; try all things; hold fast that which is good. You are the most concerned in what relates to your own interest; and where-ever you place implicit confidence, sooner or later, you will infallibly be deceived."

The other side, on the other hand, take this for their text, and preach this for their doctrine:—"You (the people) have no right to think; the king has a right to 'press you for the use of his navy or his army, and kill you; nay you, 'the swinish multitude,' have nothing to do with politics; leave that to your rulers; they know best what is good for you; you have no need to think for yourselves; pay your taxes quietly, and they will take care to think for you."

And now, Brothers and Fellow-citizens, let us sum up the whole Address, with sentiments out of '*The true-born Englishman*,' and Mr. Pope, in his '*Essay on Man*.'

"The great invading Norman let us know
 "What conquerors in after times might do;
 "To every musketeer he brought to town,
 "He gave the lands that never were his own.
 "When first the English crown he did obtain,
 "He did not send his Dutchmen home again:
 "No re-assumptions in his reign were known,
 "D'Av'nant

" D'Av'nant might there have let his book alone.
 " No parliament his army could disband;
 " He rais'd no money, for he paid in land.
 " He gave his legions their eternal station,
 " And made them all freeholders of the nation :
 " He canton'd out the country to his men,
 " And every soldier was a denizen.
 " The rascals thus enrich'd, he call'd them Lords,
 " To please their upstart pride with new-made words,
 " And doomsday-book his tyranny records."

" Behold the child, by nature's kindly law,
 " Pleas'd with a rattle, tickled with a straw :
 " Stars, garters, gold, amuse his riper stage,
 " And beads and prayer-books are the toys of age.
 " Then look about, and see where greatness lies ;
 " Where but among the heroes and the wise ?
 " Heroes the same, the thing is now agreed,
 " From Macedonia's madman to the Swede.—
 " If by your father's worth your own you rate,
 " Count me those only that are good and great ;
 " What can enoble slaves, and sots, and cowards ?
 " Alas ! not all the blood of all the Howards.—
 " A wit's a feather, and a chief's a rod,
 " An honest man's the noblest work of God."

DECLARATION.

DECLARATION.

“THE Constitution of the legislature is a fraudulent deception; and the people of England have, in reality, no more CHOICE or WILL in the election of their pretended representation, than the people of *Hindostan*, *Persia*, or *Turkey*.” [*Lessons to a young Prince*, p. 25.]

We, therefore, as PATRIOTS, as VOLUNTEERS; anxious for the restoration of our CONSTITUTION to its primitive simplicity, solemnly pledge ourselves to all and to each other of this society, and to the community at large, that we will use our utmost endeavours, consistent with peace and good order (acting in concert with other societies) to regain a more equal representation and shorter duration of parliament, together with a free mode of election, so as to obtain a real representation of the *national will*, the surest guide and guardian of public happiness,

“Call to mind the sentiments which nature has engraved in the heart of every citizen, and which take a new force when solemnly recognized by all;—for a nation to love liberty, it is
sufficient

sufficient that she knows it; and to be free, it is sufficient that she wills it."

The flint of oppression, and steel of persecution has kindled the flame of liberty in the mind of every loyal citizen, and opposition, so far from checking the glowing principle, will make it burn with redoubled ardour.—Liberty is one of *God's* first gifts, and man's greatest blessing, but state-craft and priest-craft, have so far prevailed against it, that of late it was but little known, and less understood. Now the mote is about to be extracted from the human eye, the veil of darkness rent, and the lamp of reason seems to gain a place in the political zenith of the human mind.

Let us, then, who have felt its more immediate and salutary influence, be unanimous in the pursuit of knowledge, in endeavouring to obtain that inestimable pearl, and convince the world that Lazarus is not dead, but sleepeth. Let us by our commendable deportment make manifest to Europe that the true spirit of liberty is a spirit of order, and that to obtain justice it is consistent that we be just ourselves. The objects of our wishes, are *peace not passion, truth not treason, reformation not revolution; tools to no man, adherents of no party*, we declare ourselves the stern advocates of universal philanthropy, and warm friends of every measure, tending to alleviate the distresses or better the condition of our brother man.

In

In pursuance of the said purpose, it is

Resolved,

That we enter into a subscription; and that our immediate object be the acquisition and dissemination of political knowledge.

Resolved, That we shall be happy in the communications of other societies established for the same purpose.

Resolved, That no person can be admitted into this society but such as recognizes our principles by an unqualified assent to the declaration, and pledges himself in like manner with us.

Resolved, That this society disclaims and abhors every idea of attempting a revolution; and wish only for the restoration and renovation of our constitution to its primitive principles and excellences; and to obtain this, they are determined to persevere by every orderly, peaceable, legal, and constitutional means in their power, in which they have no doubt of being joined by millions of their fellow citizens; and that in due time, the united efforts of independent and virtuous men will be crowned with success.

Signed by order of the societies,

JOHN HARRISSON, *President.*

JOHN KILMISTER, *Secretary.*

GEORGE HILL, *Treasurer.*

RULES and ORDERS.

THE great object of this Institution being of the utmost Importance to the People of Great Britain, individually, and in a particular manner to the middle and lower orders, it is not the immediate concern of one Town or County only, but of the whole Nation. The Members, therefore, of this Society, are seriously inclined, and firmly determined, to use their best Endeavours in co-operating with their Fellow Citizens and Lovers of their Country, in all parts of the Kingdom, in order to obtain a speedy and effectual Reform (by a removal of the abuses) of Government, and the Restoration or Establishment of our natural and just Rights, an equal Representation of the People in Parliament.

And as our efforts will, to the best of our Abilities, be applied to the sole purpose of obtaining Justice for ourselves and Fellow Citizens, it is consistent that we be just ourselves; for these Reasons, and for the entire Purpose of preserving Peace, Regularity, and good Order, throughout the whole Body of this numerous
and

and increasing Society, the following Rules and Orders were adopted by the Committee, and approved of by the Society at large:—

RULE I.

THAT the number of members be unlimited, and that no person be admitted as a member thereof, but such whose sentiments and conduct agrees to, and corresponds with the solemn declaration contained in our printed *Address to the Public*, a copy of which must be read, or delivered to every person at his admittance.

II.

That at each of the circular, and general Meetings, one or more proper Persons be appointed as door-keepers, to inspect the tickets, and to receive such contributions as may be necessary to defray the expence of the room (or the reckoning if at a public house) such contribution not to exceed three-pence for each member.

III.

That no person be admitted into any of the circular meetings, but such who shall produce a ticket, or such as do receive one at their entrance, for which they shall pay six-pence; and that each member be duly entered, his name, residence, and number of his ticket; a fair copy of which, to be delivered to the Secretary, on, or before the next ensuing committee meeting.

IV.

That a judicious person be appointed at each Meeting, by the members then met, to preside as Chairman, and that particular and due attention be paid to his calling to order.

V. That

V.

That if any argument or debate take place, which tends to disturb and disorder the Meeting, if, after order is called for by the Chairman, any person or persons, do still persist in support of such argument or debate, contrary to good order, he, or they, shall be deemed disorderly and ungovernable, and shall be ordered to withdraw.

VI.

That no person, being intoxicated with liquor, shall be admitted at the time, either into the Society as a member, or into any meeting of the members of this Society.

VII.

Liberty is allowed, by this article, to any person who may rather chuse to deliver his sentiments in writing, to read it publicly in the meeting, (provided the Chairman and Secretary are previously acquainted therewith, and their approbation be first obtained) and that such declaration after being publicly read in the meeting, be delivered to the Secretary to be filed.

VIII.

That when any one person is upon his feet, either reading or otherwise publicly addressing himself, in the meeting, no other person shall be permitted to stand up and speak, or otherwise disturb and render confusion, until such person shall have read or delivered what he was about, or until order is called for by the Chairman.

IX.

That proper minutes be made, and regularly entered, at each meeting, of all the proceedings and resolutions of such matters as the meetings may judge necessary to be reported to the select committee, for the better information of this Society, and for the increase of knowledge amongst every degree of our Fellow Citizens throughout this nation.

IX The

X.

The mode of chusing or electing the general and select committee, &c. subject to such further regulations, as a majority of the members may in future think proper to adopt.

That the number of delegates, or general committee men, from each circular meeting, shall be proportioned to the number of members, who do regularly attend at each respective meeting, viz. Every ten members throughout the whole shall appoint and delegate one general committee man, and therefore any one meeting consisting of ten members, shall send one; if twenty, it sends two; if thirty, three; &c. but if any one meeting do not contain ten members, it shall send one, notwithstanding. The general committee to meet once a month, and continue in office three months; the general committee, being thus chosen and elected by the whole body, are by them directed and authorized, to choose, and elect the select committee from among themselves, when met, in such a manner and proportion as they think most proper; and the said select committee, are in the name of the whole to act and transact the business of this Society to the best of their judgments; to act in conjunction with the general committee, at their monthly meeting, and to continue in office three months.

XI.

That every member who may be chosen, and accept the appointment, either as a deputy, committee man, or any other office, is by order of this Society, enjoined to attend regularly the committee, and other meetings, while in office; and to execute his deputation agreeable to his appointment; for every omission of such attendance, he shall forfeit and pay two-pence into the hands of the treasurer, for the common stock; unless he produce a satisfactory reason for such neglect, to a majority of the committee members when met; on refusing to pay such forfeit, or

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rendering a satisfactory reason, to be discharged, and another chosen in his place.

XII.

That the twelve associating members, and friends of this Society, whose names are entered, and who are accepted members of the Society for constitutional information in London, are by this Society expected to attend regularly, and to act in conjunction with the select committee, and to communicate to them every information in their power. Their frequent inattention to this injunction will be noticed by the Society as a wilful neglect of their duty, and will be censured accordingly.

XIII.

Matters of Complaint or Accusation.

That if any one, or more members of this Society, shall have any complaint or accusation against any one or more members, of acting, or holding forth principles contrary to the rules and orders, or the peaceable principles held forth by this Society; such complaint or accusation shall be fairly stated in writing, and by the accuser or accusers delivered to the chairman of that meeting where the accused usually do attend, and the chairman shall read it publicly in the meeting; if the majority of that meeting shall deem it inadmissible and groundless, they are hereby authorized to reprimand the accuser or accusers, and upon his or their making a proper acknowledgement of their error, the matter to subside; but on refusal to comply herewith, or that the majority of the said meeting shall deem it admissible, and that there is sufficient matter to ground the charge upon, the committee members from that meeting, shall bring the report of the said meeting in writing signed by six members, together with the written accusation, to the select committee; if the business appear to them small and trivial, and both parties will amicably agree

to settle the controversy, as advised by the select committee, then to be dropt; but if that committee apprehend the business to be of such a serious nature as to operate to the injury of the Society, or any individual thereof, or to the cause they are engaged in, it shall be referred to the judgment of the general committee; and their determination shall be final, and the guilty party shall be expelled this Society.

XIV.

That a Treasurer and a Secretary be appointed and authorized by the select committee; to whom they shall be responsible for the trust reposed in them; and the accounts to be settled every three months.

XV.

That the Secretary be requested and empowered by the committee to correspond as occasion requires, with every other similar institution in this kingdom, after manifesting his intention to the committee, shewing his production and receiving their instructions accordingly.

(COPY.)

Sheffield, June 11th, 1792.—This day, in the Town-hall, at a very numerous Meeting (pursuant to public Advertisement in both the Sheffield Newspapers) of the Gentlemen, Clergy, Tradesmen, Manufacturers, and other Inhabitants of the Town and Neighbourhood of Sheffield, convened for the purpose of taking into consideration the propriety of an Address of thanks to the King, for his late Proclamation, the business being opened by the Chairman, the following Speech was delivered by a Manufacturer:

FELLOW - TOWNSMEN,

IT is my opinion, that no thanks are due to the King, from his People, on account of his late Proclamation.—It is my opinion that it neither has had, nor will have any good effect; but the reverse. Its tendency is to alarm and frighten the timid and weak-minded, for no sensible man will be affected by it at all. If his Majesty, or his ministers, supposed it would intimidate those persons who have lately associated in different parts of the Kingdom, for inquiring into the abuses of Government, and the spreading of such Information as appears to them important and necessary for the people to be acquainted with, to the end that a reform in the present corrupt representation may be obtained, they will, I apprehend, be miserably mistaken. The measure is seen through, and only tends to quicken their zeal in the excellent work. But, supposing it could have had this effect, shall Britons thank their governors for a measure which would prevent their making inquiry into the conduct of such governors? It is a sure criterion of the delinquency of governors, when they

they are afraid of the people.—As to its preventing riots and tumults, it is ridiculous to suppose such a thing. Wherever there are discontents, a Proclamation will not remove them; but, by giving encouragement to busy and weak-minded magistrates, and peace-officers, to exert their authority in an extraordinary manner, will most likely *occasion* riots. Have they not recently done this in London? by taking into custody a few harmless persons who were amusing themselves by dancing! A more scandalous proceeding than this never happened in the police of any country! and this is the effect of the proclamation, for which we are so *wisely* called together to thank his Majesty for issuing!—What! shall Britons bend their necks to the chain, and kiss the hand that puts it on? Rather rouse, my Fellow-Townsmen, to the danger of your situation. Proclamations are bad precedents. Have we not laws to punish all kinds of offenders?—what need then of proclamations? They are not laws: and beware how they come to be considered of any weight. Britons, this is a critical time in which we live, we have it in our choice to be free-men or slaves. If we suffer ourselves to remain the beasts of burden we have too long been, by tamely carrying without complaint, every load laid upon us by those whom we pay for the very purpose, nothing but slavery can follow: you need only wish to be free, to be so. Have not some of the first men in the nation, many of them members of parliament, erected a standard, to which they invite all those to repair, who have yet any sparks of that liberty so highly valued by our forefathers, and without their ardent love of which, we had never experienced its blessings?

There may be some persons here, perhaps, who may not be acquainted with the term Slavery here complained of, nor with the Freedom held out for their relief. I will in a few words explain them.

It

It is the blessing (or ought be) of every Englishman to be governed by laws to which he has, either by himself, or by some one whom he has appointed for the purpose, given his consent; and consequently, that no tax whatever, can be laid upon him, without his or his agent's assent to it.—Is this at present the case? No; the present parliament for ought we know, may pass a bill to strip us all of our possessions, of every thing we hold dear in life; as it is well known that the minister, and those who vote with him, could carry *any* measure however hostile to the interest of the body of the people, whose *servants* the House of Commons are. Faithful servants truly.—Alas! they are not servants; they have usurped our situation, *we* are servants, and *they* are masters. How does this arise? Nothing can be more clear. They do not now depend upon the people for their election or continuance in parliament: if they are chosen by the votes of a small part of the people, those votes are generally bought, and what a man buys he scruples not to sell. But very many of the members of parliament are sent from places which are entirely the property of one man, which places are commonly bought and sold at immense sums, on account of this privilege of sending two members to parliament. Is it any longer wonderful that ministers command majorities upon any question? No, no, it is rather more wonderful that we possess even the shadow of Liberty!

Shall we thank governors then for endeavouring to stifle our inquiring into these grievances, and a wish to remove them. No.—Let not the efforts of a free people to correct notorious abuses be termed *seditious*. Let not six sevenths of the people of this country be any longer deprived of their just rights. Let us no longer bribe men to betray our trusts. Let us have independent honest members of parliament; what can we expect from hirelings? They will always be the janissaries of a minister, and when he ceases to pay them, they will strangle him.

No

No wonder that our taxes are grievous. That every family of seven persons pays yearly for the support of government, besides the poor-rates *eighteen* pounds so that this town alone pays upwards of an *hundred thousand pounds** annually, and is not suffered to have the choice of one steward in the House of Commons to take some care of the expending of this enormous sum. Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Halifax, and other large towns are in the same situation.

It may be objected, what have poor men to do with parliament? What right have they to busy themselves with what should concern men of property only?—I answer, that the poor man has a stake as dear to him in the country in which he lives, as is that of the greatest peer in the realm to him, his liberty, his life, his dearest connexions, his all.

Suffer a man of this description, then, my Townsmen, a poor man, to rouse you from the lethargy into which you seem to be fallen. Let us turn our thoughts to the serious situation in which we stand. We have it in our power to restore the government to its original strength and purity, without *innovation*, or any dangerous experiment. To reform abuses is the only way to prevent confusion.—Hearken then, to a plain man (good sense is not confined to rank) while he advises every man who can feel for the honour and dignity of his country, as well to prevent any attempt being made to introduce a republican form of government, as to save us from the fangs of despotic power, to unite in resolving, in union with the society in London, under the title of the Friends of the People, to use every peaceable, legal, and constitutional means to restore short parliaments, universal right of suffrage, and perfect free-

* This is applied to Sheffield.—Birmingham is supposed to contain near 70,000 inhabitants; but even computing it at 60,000, on a calculation of 3*l.* 7*s.* 6*d.* each individual in this town, pays annually to government the moderate sum of £202,500*l.*—Do we not pay enough for our *invaluable blessing*?